

cover from which he arose and immediately resumes the call note.

Despite the fact that I have been a lonesome spectator to these demonstrations for years and years, they are the most fascinating of bird manoeuvres.

The sitting bird successfully suppresses all signs of nervousness as she sits motionless upon her eggs beneath the shadow of a drooping branch or broken stub. It seems impossible to conceive that the same bird (for the male often incubates) is capable of such an animated flight and gifted with the remarkable vocal power which he utters during the mating and breeding seasons.

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## A TIME WITH THE OWLS.

BY DR. R. W. SHUFELDT, WASHINGTON, D. C.

One afternoon, sometime during the first part of January (1914), when returning from the United States National Museum where I had been looking over some owls, I passed up Tenth Street, only a few paces from the building in which I had been, when I spied, suspended for sale in one of the markets, a fine specimen of the Barred Owl (*Strix v. varia*). It was an old bird in perfect plumage, and I secured it for a quarter of a dollar. Recently they have been quite numerous in this section, and this one was shot within a couple of miles of where I stood when making the purchase.

Several days passed before I could get at this specimen; but when I did, I obtained from it a very perfect skeleton as well as a part of the plumage. On opening its stomach—a practice I never neglect—it was found to contain the remains of three or four small mice. As usual, these remains had formed into “pellets,” principally consisting of hair and bones. Some of the jaws were quite complete, and these I saved, later on showing them to Mr. Gerrit S. Miller, Jr., Curator of the Division of Mammals of the U. S. National



THE VISAGE OF THE SNOWY OWL (*NYCTEA NYCTEA*; ADULT)  
Photo by Dr. Shufeldt

Museum, who kindly pronounced them to be those of specimens of *Pitymys pinetorum*.

While investigating some of the anatomy of this owl—another practice I am almost invariably guilty of during such operations—there came to hand a package from Mr Edward E. Schmid, the well-known proprietor of an extensive Pet Emporium in Washington, containing not only a fine Macaw (*Ara macao*), but also an unusually good specimen of a Snowy Owl (*Nyctea nyctea*). Both specimens had recently died, and they were adults in fine plumage. Mr. Schmid kindly sends me all such material, and has done so for many years. He is well known to the naturalists of the Smithsonian, where he occasionally sends such animals as die on his hands.

Here was Owl No. 2, and from it I obtained another fine skeleton, together with not a little more of its structure or its anatomy, as some people say. Parts of this were so important that I wrote out a description of them, which will appear elsewhere later on.

I did not photograph the Barred Owl, though I usually secure negatives of nearly all specimens coming to my study; I find the prints are often valuable, especially for the use of taxidermists. Turning my camera, however, on the face of this Snowy Owl, I got a good negative of it, a print from which is here reproduced to show how useful such pictures may sometimes be. I have many of them, not only of birds, but of a great number of other animals. This is not an example of the best ones, for the big, yellow eyes took black, which is unfortunate. I have some parrots that it would be hard to say whether they had been taken from dead or from living specimens; later on I propose to publish some of these—in fact, a few of them are being engraved as I write these lines.

While contemplating the structure of my Snowy Owl, a curious coincidence occurred, for *two* more of the same species came to hand. This time, however, they came from Copenhagen, Denmark, being a most generous gift of my friend, Mr. Gerhard Heilmann of that city. I hasten to say that



A PAIR OF SNOWY OWLS

From a painting by Gerhard Heilmann, Copenhagen, Denmark

it was an oil painting of these birds, the subjects being natural size and in an elegant plain frame of gilt (30x30 inches).

As posed by the artist, these Owls are shown in Fig. 2, which is a reproduction of a photograph I made of this beautiful picture. It will be noted that they are sitting on a dark rock, partly covered with snow, the rock being on the shore of the frozen sea on the north coast of Denmark. The birds are contemplating the setting sun, and Mr. Heilmann has been wonderfully successful in depicting the rosy hues of the same, as its rays tinge their white plumages and the glistening ice on all sides. As we say of so many beautiful things in this world, this picture should be seen to be appreciated.

At the present time, Mr. Heilmann is engaged upon a very important piece of work—a study of the origin of birds from their ancestral stock among the prehistoric reptiles. Two Parts of this work are already published, with many fine illustrations, and the remaining three Parts will appear during the course of 1914.

With my Barred Owl, and old *Nyctea* coming in threes, I surely thought that my strigine experiences—following upon each other with such rapidity—would come to an end; but no, I was to be treated to another immediately on top of them. Hardly had my picture been hung in an appropriate place, than a call on my 'phone from Mr. Schmid informed me that he had at my service a fine, living specimen of an adult Saw-whet Owl (*Cryptoglaux a. arcadica*), which had been captured in the city (Washington) the day before. As usual, the man who took it simply walked up to the bird and "bagged it." In less than an hour it was in a small cage in my study, at which time the amusements for the afternoon were opened. He was not altogether a fractious subject, however; not nearly as bad as many another live bird I have photographed.

It seems to me that all my life I wanted to have in my possession a specimen of a living Owl of this species; and now, after waiting for over half a century, here was the real



SAW-WHET OWL (*CRYPTOGLAUX A. ARCADIA*)  
Photo from life by Dr. Shufeldt. Reduced.

thing: a perfectly healthy, adult "Saw-whet," in elegant winter plumage.

There are but very few even passable pictures of this owl extant and a good many very poor ones. Many years ago I saw one, painted life-size in water-color by John Woodhouse Audubon, the erratic son of the well-known Franco-American ornithologist. Without exception I think it was the worst picture of an owl that I recall having ever seen. It reminded me of the labored drawing of a bird's nest by a little fellow seven years old, who, when he had finished his sketch, showed it to his father with no small degree of pride. "What is it intended to represent, my son?" said the father, after gazing at it for a moment or so with a puzzled expression. "A bird's nest," explained the young hopeful. "Oh," said his parent, "it looked to me like a pretty good attempt to draw a cyclone."

On this occasion I will not state exactly how many dry plates I expended on this little representative of the *Strigidae*; but it was a number over a box of five by eights and two eight by tens. I don't regret it though, for I did get some pictures after the first few attempts, and some good ones. One of these last is reproduced here (Fig. 3).

In studying him, I noticed that, when his eyes were closed, the feathering below them became very prominent, bulging outward and downward like two tufts—one beneath either eye. This was especially the case when he started to doze off to sleep, and it is a character in the plumage of this owl that I have never seen described. Thus far, he has refused to drink any water, and will not eat raw beef placed as little bits in his cage at night. So I have kept him alive by feeding him with the same, putting the pieces, one at a time, into his mouth with a pair of spring forceps. After swallowing two or three pieces, he became very lively during the course of the following ten minutes. I believe he would relish a sparrow, but I have not as yet secured one in that I might make the trial. As a matter of fact, I do not believe he will live very long in confinement; but should he succumb, there is another skeleton coming to my collection.



This is all I have had to do with owls for the last five or six days.

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## PIED-BILLED GREBE NOTES.

BY IRA N. GABRIELSON.

Ever since the time, when as a small boy, I first discovered that the mass of decaying vegetation found floating in the swamps was the nest of the Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) this species has been of great interest to me. In the course of observations from year to year a few facts of interest have been noted that I do not recall seeing in print.

The species nests here (Northwestern Iowa\*) around the edge of the lakes and ponds in the rushes and in the cat-tail swamps. The nest is built of decaying vegetation and is usually floating, slightly anchored to the surrounding reeds. The eggs, when left, are completely covered with the nest material and occasionally a few green reeds. The statement is often seen that the bird covers the eggs in this manner, but I do not remember of seeing any explanation as to how this was accomplished. After watching many times one was discovered in the act. She stood or rather sat on the edge of the nest and used the beak to root the nest material over the eggs. In this manner she worked entirely around the eggs until they were hidden from view. The beak was then used, much as a robin uses hers in ironing the nest, to spread the material around. She then seized one or two reeds, broke them off with a quick sidewise jerk of the head, laid them across the nest, and sliding into the water swam away.

It is commonly known that many birds will feign injury to entice an intruder away from the nest or young, but to me, at least, it was a great surprise to know that the Pied-billed Grebe would occasionally resort to this artifice. Only two instances of this have come to my notice, and both of these occurred on the same day, June 26, 1913. In com-

\* This includes notes made in a Nebraska swamp just across the Missouri River from Sioux City, Iowa, as well as those in Iowa.